(b) Does not arise.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) The upgradation programme of forty MIG-27 aircraft has already commenced. During the Design & Development phase, Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) will do the avionics integration activities and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) will carry out the modification work on two aircraft. The series modification of the remaining aircraft will be undertaken by HAL.

Sino-lndian AIR and naval exercise

302. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Sino-lndian air and naval exercises are on the cards;

(b) if so, whether such joint exercises would be a step towards betterment of relations between the two coutries; and

(c) if so, what are the probable dates and venue of the exercises?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) During the visit of our Prime Minister to China in June 2003, the possibility of joint naval search and rescue exercises was agreed to. As of now, there are no plans to carry out any exercises involving the Air Forces of the two countries.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) The probable dates and the venue for such exercises have not been worked out as yet.

Damage to aircraft carrier Vikrant

303. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government of Maharashtra had lately invited attenton of Government to the threat of the aircraft carrier Vikrant getting submerged and incurring irreparable damage, unless rescue operations are taken before monsoon; and